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ABSTRACT

This research project on the Italian-American family examines the differential role of the mother and father in the transmission of ethnic identity to the children. Ethnicity is conceptualized here, in part, as a system of rules or norms which define acceptable behavior and which distinguishes one's own kind from others. One of the most prominent areas in which ethnic variation can be identified centers on the normative content of family roles and in the imperatives to maintain generational and extended family ties. An important area of theoretical interest lies in the identification of the differential effectiveness of the mother and father in articulating and transmitting these norms. This paper compares two random samples of families with adolescent children: (1) Italian-Americans married to Italian-Americans (n=75), and (2) Italian-Americans married to non-Italians (n=100). Areas of family life examined include parental obligation, kinship interaction, marital power and childrearing norms in the areas of independence training and social control. Variation in these areas are examined on the basis of intermarriage, social class and the ethnicity of the wife. (Author)

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Parental Variation in the Transmission of Ethnicity Among Italian-Americans

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Although ethnicity is an increasingly important phenomenon of investigation in the social sciences, researchers must continue to grapple not only with conceptual and definitional problems, but also with the identification of the basic unit of study. The major consensus is that ethnicity stems from membership in a group of common origin which is submerged in a larger collectivity. From this point on, studies become quite diversified into investigations of ethnicity as a power interest group relationship (Cohen, 1974),as a cultural evaluative system (Barth, 1969) (Papajohn and Spiegel, 1975),as a unit of social structure (Yancey etal, 1976) or as a psychological component in individual behavior (Schooler, 1976) While it has been suggested that economic and political factors have acted in some cases to crystallize kinship networks (Yancey etal, 1976), few investigators turn to the family as a basic unit, which gives the form and meaning to ethnicity and acts as a carrier of ethnicity in its socialization of the younger generation. (Greeley, 1967).

Such a focus of study does present some difficulties namely in the distinction between ethnicity and social class as determinant of familial variation. For example, Catholic ethnic groups from Southern and Eastern Europe are found to have some characteristics of the individual and the primary group which vary from Protestant groups (Schooler, 1976; Winch and Greer, 1968). However, variation is sometimes difficult to distinguish from blue collar families in general (Gans, 1962; Duncan and Duncan, 1968). Furthermore, increased intermarriage among Catholics of various ethnic backgrounds has caused some to suggest that religion rather than ethnicity is a more important identificational unit (Kennedy, 1952; Herberg, 1955). Abramson (1973), on the other hand, found ethnic patterns persist despite intermarriage among Catholics.

This report is part of a larger study which investigates the Italian-American family in the middle stages of the family cycle. Our study has attempted to determine the sources solidarity in the family and to delineate the mechanisms which operate to attach or detach members within the larger family. We have defined these sources

of integration which create intimacy, need satisfaction and group allegiance as interdependence. Principal components of interdependence include: 1) network connectedness (the degree of generation, kinship and ethnic integration); 2) filial obligations toward aged parents; 3) kinship solidarity; 4) marriage (the degree to which it is joint or segregrated; 5) childrearing (the degree of independence training and social control used; 6.) attitudes toward authority and dependence; and 7) over all evaluative scores in interdependence.

On the basis of previous research it is possible to predict that the Italian-American family would display high interdependence which includes generational, kinship and ethnic integration in the network, high filial obligation and kinship solidarity, segregated marriages and childrearing practices which stress dependence and strict discipline and favorable attitudes on authority and dependence (Covello, 1967; Cronin, 1970; Lopreato, 1970; Gans, 1962; Rosen, 1959; Kohn, 1969). It was also predicted that these patterns would change with intermarriage and mobility into the middle class.

These predictions are based on the assumption that ethnicity can act as a carrier of familial integrative mechanisms which, when successful, in turn act to perpetuate ethnically-determined patterns to the next generation. Hence, ethnicity, where relevant to one's identity, has its source in part in primary group relationships and is reinforced in patterns of socialization throughout the life cycle (Johnson and Johnson, 1975). Ethnicity, in this case, can provide a normative system which defines behavioral boundaries of familial roles such as in solutions on how to raise children, care for aged parents or maintain kinship ties. Obviously, this is a more limited definition of ethnicity than that usually found in the literature and must be for the time being considered a working definition, subject to change as our research and others indicate the presence or absense of ethnically variant family patterns.

If family patterns which are ethnically based can be identified, then one can study the effects of the key variables of intermarriage and social mobility as to the impact they have in changing the ethnic patterns. Of even more interest is the relative effectiveness of the mother and father in articulating and transmitting these ethnic norms and behaviors. Variation in these patterns can be determined through a comparison of the following groups: 1) in-married and out-married Italian-Americans 2) Italian women married to Italians and Italian women married to non-Italians 3) all Italian wives irrespective of whom they married and all non-Italian wives married to Italian men. Further comparisons are reported for blue and white collar groups of in-married and out-married families and Italian and non-Italian wives. Key areas of the family are identified which appear resistant to change despite intermarriage or the ethnicity of the wife.

Methods

The date reported here is derived from two samples randomly selected from marriage registers between the years, 1948 and 1960. The in-married families (Italian-Italian marriages) include 74 families which can in turn be divided into 31 white collar and 43 blue collar families. The out-married families (Italian-non-Italian marriages) include 98 families which are divided into 34 white collar and 64 blue collar families. The latter group includes 53 Italian wives married to non-Italian husbands and 45 Italian husbands married to non-Italian wives. The majority of all Italians, 58%, are members of the second generation (children of immigrants).

The data are derived from focused interviews with all wives. Lasting 2 to 3 hours, the interviews combined both open-ended and structured questions, projective stories, independence training scales and attitude measures on authority and

dependence.[1] The interviews were subject to blind coding techniques with the intercoder reliability ranging between 85% to 97%. Items which contributed to the interdependence measure were assigned numerical value and were calculated for various areas of family life (kinship, childrearing, etc.) and for a total score. To date, t-tests have been run to identify significant differences between the relevant groups.[2]

The categories used for comparison included the following items for measurement:

1. Network connectedness (generational, kinship and ethnic-integration)-- The family's social activities were examined to determine the participation of children and grandparents, kin, and Italian-American friends.

2. Filial obligations -- Questions probed both the attitudes and behaviors toward elderly parents, in addition to expectations respondents had for their children in the future.

3. Kinship -- Measurements derived from the frequency of contact with relatives both in informal and formal activities and the reciprocal aid patterns.

4. Marriage -- This measure included items on communication patterns, power distribution, mutual support patterns and the degree of marital segregation in social activities.

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[1]All wives were interviewed irrespective of their ethnicity, this being the data reported here. One-third of the husbands of the in-marrieds have been interviewed as have most of the Italian husbands married to non-Italians. However, since we are still trying to secure interviews with all Italian husbands in the out-married families, we have not completed analysis of the data from the husbands.

[2]This research also includes a sample of geographically mobile Italians and a matched control group of Protestant, white, non-Italians. Since interviews are still being collected in these samples, this report must be considered a preliminary analysis and one which uses rather gross tests of differences between groups. Upon completion of all data collection in the next month, more sensitive tests will be used on various specific items.

5. Childrearing -- Questions were geared to teenage children in the areas of discipline, supervision and values (the degree to which ego-centric versus socio-centric goals were emphasized.

6. Attitudes on authority and dependence -- A pen and paper test was devised on problems of authority versus permissiveness and dependence versus independence as they relate to rearing teenage children.

7. Total interdependence -- This score is a total of all areas of the interview which reflect overall interdependence of the family (as opposed to independence).

Findings

The significant differences between groups, summarized in the following tables, indicate changes in the level of interdependence, which take place with intermarriage in general. My assumption is that a tentative model of the Italian-American family can be identified by examining significant differences found when this type is compared to intermarried families. Further group comparisons reveal the characteristics of Italian women in general, irrespective of whom they marry. Then through comparison of all Italian women and all non-Italian women, some assumptions can be made on the ethnic determinants in family organization. Similar but more limited comparisons are made for social class variation.

More specifically group comparisons were made between the following sub-groups:

a. In-married families and out-married families -- Italians married to Italians compared to Italians married to non-Italians
b. In-married and out-married wives -- Italian wives married to Italian husbands compared to Italian wives married to non-Italian husbands
c. All Italian wives compared to all non-Italian wives
d. In-married compared to out-married families in the blue collar group
e. All Italian wives compared to non-Italian wives in the blue collar group
f. In-married compared to out-married families in the white collar group
g. All Italian wives compared to non-Italian wives in the white collar group

The changes, which take place with intermarriage in general, irrespective of the sex of the out-marrying individual, are impressive and are extended to most areas of family life (Table 1). Network connectedness and kinship solidarity appear to be particularly affected, which indicates that out-marriage among Italian-Americans leads to more nucleated families. There is also a movement toward more permissive childrearing, more companionate marriages and a lessening of attitudes on authority and dependence.

Turning to Italian women and comparing those who marry Italians and those who marry non-Italians, one finds that network connectedness and kinship solidarity decreases when the husband is non-Italian which also signifies more nucleated family patterns. Childrearing patterns also are affected by intermarriage with a movement toward a lessening of discipline and supervision. However, it is interesting to note that there are no significant differences in filial obligations. This finding suggests that Italian women retain considerable supportive patterns toward their elderly parents irrespective of whom they marry.

A comparison of all Italian women and all non-Italian women (married to Italian men) indicates that filial obligations are again more characteristic of Italian women, which are not absorbed by non-Italian women even if they marry into an Italian family. Italian women also have significantly higher scores on attitudes on authority and dependence.

Social class comparisons shed particularly interesting insights on the effects of intermarriage and ethnicity (Table 2). In examining blue collar families, one finds that although intermarriage does decrease the total level of interdependence in the family, it is not particularly pervasive and only significantly lessens the connectedness of the network. However, when one compares all blue collar Italian women with non-Italian women, one finds that filial obligations and attitudes on authority and dependence remain an important characteristic of Italian women even

TABLE 1 - GROUP COMPARISON ON IN- and OUT-MARRIED ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES

	Intermarriage								
	In-Married	a	Out-Married	It. Wives In-Married	b	It. Wives Out-Married	All It. Wives	c	All non-It. Wives
Network	9.0135 n=74	***	7.8571 n=98	9.0411 n=73	***	8.000 n=53	8.6032 n=126	**	7.6739 n=46
Parents	24.8243 n=74	**	22.9296 n=98	24.8082 n=73		32.5283 n=53	24.2698 n=126	*	22.3065 n=46
Kinship	41.2027 n=74	***	35.8163 n=98	41.2055 n=73	***	34.6792 n=53	38.4603 n=126		37.2391 n=46
Marital	13.0556 n=72	*	11.8211 n=95	13.0563 n=71		11.7400 n=50	12.5124 n=126		11.9348 n=46
Childrearing	28.0685 n=73	**	26.1474 n=95	28.1111 n=72	*	26.2885 n=52	27.3468 n=124		25.9545 n=44
Attitudes Auch/Dep.	60.8596 n=57	*	57.4302 n=86	60.8929 n=56		59.3830 n=47	60.2039 n=103	***	55.1750 n=40
Total	112.3243 n=74	***	100.4439 n=98	112.3699 n=73	***	100.3396 n=53	107.3095 n=126	**	100.7500 n=46

* $t < .05$
** $t < .01$
*** $t < .001$

TABLE 2 - GROUP COMPARISONS BY SOCIAL CLASS OF IN- AND OUT-MARRIED ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES

	Blue Collar			Blue Collar			Soc. Class - White			Soc. Class - White		
	In-Married	d	Out-Married	It. Wives	e	Non-It. Wives	In-Married	f	Out-Married	It. Wives	g	Non-It. Wives
etwork	8.8605 n=43	*	7.9375 n=64	8.4935 n=77		7.8333 n=30	9.2258 n=31	***	7.7059 n=34	8.7755 n=49	**	7.3750 n=16
arents	24.6512 n=43		23.3922 n=64	24.5130 n=77	*	22.3200 n=30	25.0645 n-31	***	22.0588 n=34	23.8877 n=49		22.2813 n=16
inship	39.0233 n=43		36.1563 n=64	37.2987 n=77		37.3333 n=30	44.2258 n=31	***	35.1765 n=34	40.2857 n=49		37.0625 n=16
arital	13.7143 n=42		12.2581 n=62	13.1486 n=74		12.1000 n=30	12.1333 n=30		11.000 n=33	11.5106 n=47		11.6250 n=16
hild - earing	27.8571 n=42		26.4262 n=61	26.9200 n=75		27.2500 n=28	28.3548 n=31	*	25.6470 n=34	28.000 n=49	**	23.6875 n=16
ttitudes uth/Dep.	60.8571 n=35		57.2407 n=54	59.8594 n=64	*	55.6000 n=25	60.8636 n=22	*	57.7500 n=32	60.7692 n=39	**	54.4667 n=15
otal	110.3953 n=43	**	102.1953 n=64	106.9415 n=77		101.7667 n=30	115.000 n=31	***	97.1470 n=34	107.8877 n=49	*	98.8438 n=16

* t. < .05
** t. < .01
*** t. < .001

if they marry out of their group. Nevertheless, a blue collar family type emerges relatively unaffected by intermarriage and the ethnicity of the wife.

The white collar families in the study group, on the other hand, appear to be much more affected by intermariage. The comparisons between the in-marrieds and out-marrieds indicate highly significant differences in network connectedness, filial obligations, kinship solidarity and childrearing patterns. When all Italian wives are compared to non-Italian wives married to Italian men, some differences are found in network connectedness, childrearing and attitudes on authority and dependence, but they are not as impressive as those found in the comparison of all in and out-married families. We do find that filial obligations and kinship solidarity are not a distinguisher among white collar Italian women, when they are compared to non-Italian women married to Italian men. Since these areas are found to be significantly different in the comparison between all in-married and out-married families in both classes, it seems logical that the Italian husband, who is married to non-Italian women, plays some role in directing the family toward higher filial obligations and kinship solidarity. In this case, the absence of significant differences is due to both groups maintaining high scores on kinship solidarity and filial obligations. An alternate explanation is that Italian white collar women change by virtue of their social class position.

The latter explanation can logically be rejected on the basis of other group comparisons not reported here. When all in-married families were compared on the basis of their social class position and when all blue and white collar families with Italian wives were compared, kinship solidarity was found to be significantly higher in the white collar groups than in the blue collar group. This finding possibly indicates that either social class or ethnicity alone cannot account for the changes found.[3]

[3]Since this result is quite unexpected, the findings must be re-examined for other variables, such as the wife's work status. It could be possible that white collar women are less likely to be employed and, hence, have more time to develop and maintain kinship ties.

The former explanation, that the Italian husband's role is important, can be supported by examining the qualitative data in the interviews of both busbands and wives. In 69% of the white collar, out-married families, the Italian husbands were indeed the ones who initated or encouraged the maintenance of the family's ties with parents and relatives. In some cases, he contributed money monthly to his parents or his wife's parents if needed. Several husbands looked favorably on their wives' parents joining their household. In these families, the husbands' kin and Italian friends generally dominated the network. On the other hand, in the families where the Italian husbands did not support extended family solidarity (31%), various accounts of cultural conflict were reported. For example, one husband attributed their isolation from kin to his wife's failure to adopt the Italian sense of family. Or several non-Italian wives reported that they were forced to take a stand to prevent their immersion into the husbands' family. Lastly, the remainder of husbands and wives had come to a mutual agreement on the primacy of the nuclear family.

On the basis of this analysis, one can tentatively conclude that the evidence from the majority of the families supports the role of the husband in raising the family's participation in the extended family. This finding could account for the absence of significant differences between the white collar Italian and non-Italian wives.

The overall measure of interdependence, a total score which includes all relevant measures in the interview, is a useful indication of the degree and direction of changes in the family. The value of this score lies in its role as a clue to follow into more specific areas of the family. Nevertheless, when one examines the total score on interdependence in blue collar Italian women as compared to non-Italian women, one finds no significant difference. Likewise, among the white collar counterparts in the same comparisons, the level of significance changes considerably from the total sample comparisons to that which looks at the ethnicity

of the wife. Although the differences are less significant, the overall patterns do indicate that Italian white collar woman can perpetuate some level of interdependence even when she marries out.

Discussion

Although systematic research on ethnic variation in family patterns is a relatively uncharted route, both popular conceptions and descriptive studies point to the persistence among some ethnic groups of family patterns which have resisted change over several generations and with social mobility. Our research, the preliminary analysis of which is reported here, has attempted to identify components of the Italian-American family and to scrutinize how these components become modified with intermarriage and social mobility. Basically, the Italian American family, defined as being one in which both parents are Italian, portray a family type which has been identified as familistic and one which varies considerably from the family model of the American middle class. Chief features include close-knit generational and kinship solidarity, segregated marriages and conservative attitudes and behavior in childrearing. We have labeled the presence of these features as interdependence, implying that individuals in such families have their needs for security and sociability met within the family. Likewise, these individuals would be more likely to place family priorities above individual priorities and would correspondingly socialize their children to adapt to the same type of interdependence.

All these categories of familial interdependence have been found to vary significantly when an Italian marries out of his or her group. However, taking the analysis further, one finds that Italian women, even when they marry non-Italians retain filial obligations and marital segregation and conservative attitudes on authority and dependence, although their network and kinship contacts become less close-knit and their child-rearing practices become more permissive. A comparison of Italian and non-Italian women further documents the conclusion that the Italian woman is higher on filial behaviors and attitudes on authority and dependence than

are those non-Italian women who marry Italian men.

In the examination of social class differences, one can conclude that in blue collar families there are few areas of differences on the basis of either intermarriage or the ethnicity of the wife. Whether the patterns found here specifically relate to Italian origin cannot be answered at this point, for most of them have been generally identified with blue collar families irrespective of ethnicity (Komorovsky, 1962; Young and Wilmott, 1957). However, one does find that the Italian woman continues to maintain higher filial obligations than her non-Italian counterpart.

The white collar families present a more complex pattern. It is obvious that intermarriage in white collar families notably changes the family in that the connectedness of the network breaks down, filial obligations lessen, kinship solidarity decreases and childrearing attitudes and behaviors change. One does find that Italian women in contrast to non-Italian women in white collar families do retain the network characteristics, the child-rearing practices and attitudes characteristic of their background. However, in view of the other findings, it is somewhat puzzling that filial obligations and kinship solidarity do not also appear to be significantly differentiated between Italian and non-Italian women who have married Italian men. A further analysis of this group led to a conclusion that the husband's role can becomes important in maintaining interdependence. There are, however, a variety of responses, as intermarried couples attempt to resolve the disparate expectations from their backgrounds. One popular notion about intermarriage involves the conclusion that the Italian family "wins out" implying that the in-marrying spouse becomes "Italianized" into the sense of family. This diffusion of familism certainly takes place in numerous cases and is eased by the generally loose boundaries around the extended family.

In summary, this research indicates the productivity of examining ethnic family systems and exploring the modifications which take place with intermarriage

and social mobility. It is obvious from the above findings that there is considerable change in most areas of family life regardless of the sex of the out-marrying spouse. Our study concludes that the examination of either intermarriage or social mobility alone provides misleading findings, for intermarriage affects blue collar and white collar families quite differently. Lastly, these findings suggest that the role of the husband be examined more closely in future studies in order to more thoroughly understand what determinants he exerts on familial change or stability.

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